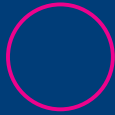




Improvement
Agency

Support Programme



Skills at Key Stage 4



Skills at Key Stage 4

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About this guide

‘Skills’ are a central focus of curriculum reform at Key Stages 3 and 4 and in post-16 education and training. The revised National Curriculum (QCA, 2007) aims to develop successful learners who:

- have the essential learning skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology
- are creative, resourceful and able to identify and solve problems
- have enquiring minds and think for themselves to process information, reason, question and evaluate
- communicate well in a range of ways
- understand how they learn and learn from their mistakes
- are able to learn independently and with others
- know about big ideas and events that shape our world
- enjoy learning and are motivated to achieve the best they can now and in the future.

This guide provides an introduction to this ‘skills agenda’. It includes:

- brief descriptions of a range of qualifications and initiatives that can support skills development at Key Stage 4
- some examples of contexts in which skills can be developed
- case studies of schools that have engaged with the ‘skills agenda’
- suggestions for sources of information, advice and guidance.

Who this guide is for

This guide is designed primarily for subject leaders and teachers working with the 14–16 age group in schools who are, or will be, responsible for planning and delivering the Key Stage 4 curriculum in the next few years.

It may also be helpful as a source of basic information for Senior Leadership Teams, and possibly for governors, as they get to grips with the policy and planning implications of these developments.

What are skills?

The skills we are talking about are not new. Teachers have always been aware of the need to develop their learners' generic skills such as effective communication, their ability to work with others, and their learning and thinking skills. What is new is that these skills are now made explicit in the curriculum. The origins of this lie in the 14–19 White Paper which states:

Success in further and higher education and in employment depends on the ability to adapt to new or changing circumstances. Independent learning skills are essential for study at university level. Businesses want skilled and enthusiastic employees who can help them respond to the rapidly changing demands of a competitive global economy. These skills are not separately taught, but brought out by expert teachers through the methods they use to teach curriculum subjects.

14–19 Education and Skills (DfES, 2005)

This guide provides information about four initiatives that can support schools in meeting the demands of the skills agenda. These are:

- key skills
- functional skills
- personal, learning and thinking skills (PLTS)
- Skills for Life.

The central characteristic of all these skills is that they are used and applied in real contexts, at school, at work and in life in general. Skills that are developed in one context should be transferable to others. Skills development should not be confined to specific subjects – learners should have opportunities to improve their skills through all aspects of the curriculum. Skills can be developed in the context of GCSEs, PSHE, the new Diplomas, work-related learning and enrichment programmes.

Teaching and learning these skills effectively will involve personalisation, collaborative learning, and assessment for learning.

Key skills

There are six key skills qualifications:

- Communication
- Application of Number
- Information and Communication Technology
- Working with Others
- Improving Own Learning and Performance
- Problem Solving.

All six are included in the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

The key skills qualifications are offered at four levels – 1, 2, 3 and 4 – corresponding to the levels in the NQF. Progression to the higher levels is characterised by:

- greater autonomy of the individual in deciding how they will apply their skills to suit different tasks and problems
- greater demands made by the situation in which the skills are applied
- use of a wider range of and more complex techniques.

Assessment of the first three key skills is through a combination of a portfolio of evidence and a test. Candidates must pass both. The wider key skills are assessed through a portfolio and optional questioning. The portfolio evidence must show how the candidate has applied their skills in a real context.

It is widely recognised that the most effective way to deliver key skills is to integrate them into the teaching of the learner's main education or training programme. This demonstrates to the learner that these are practical skills that should be applied and used in a variety of contexts to tackle problems.

All six key skills are assigned points that contribute to the Achievement and Attainment Tables: 18.8 points at Level 1, 34.5 points at Level 2, and 63 points at Level 3. For comparison, a grade D GCSE is worth 34 points.

Each key skill qualification is also worth 10 UCAS tariff points at Level 2 and 20 at Level 3.

Weblinks: www.qca.org.uk/qca_6444.aspx

www.qca.org.uk/14-19/11-16-schools/index_s5-3-using-key-skills.htm

Functional skills

The origins of functional skills lie in the *14–19 Education and Skills* White Paper (February 2005), which followed the Tomlinson report of 2004. The White Paper promised ‘an even sharper focus on the basics’ and stated that ‘Achieving functional skills in English and maths must be at the heart of the 14–19 phase.’ QCA (2007) states that:

Functional skills in English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) help people to gain the most out of life, learning and work.

All three functional skills are based on a problem-solving approach. Learners who are ‘functionally skilled’ are able to use and apply the English/mathematics/ICT that they know to tackle problems in their life and work.

There are draft functional skills standards from Entry level to Level 2. Level 2 functional skills are embedded in the September 2008 programmes of study for English, mathematics and ICT at Key Stage 4. The standards are being incorporated into the revised GCSE criteria for these subjects.

A three-year pilot of the standards and of a range of assessment models started in just over 1000 centres in September 2007. Functional skills will be incorporated in the new Diplomas from September 2008. Qualifications in the three functional skills, and the revised GCSEs, will be introduced for first teaching in 2010.

Functional skills qualifications will therefore be:

- linked to the revised GCSEs in English, mathematics and ICT – to achieve a grade C or above, candidates will have to achieve the relevant functional skill at Level 2
- a mandatory component of the new Diplomas
- available as free-standing qualifications for learners aged 14 and over.

It is anticipated that functional skills will replace the key skills of Communication, Application of Number and ICT, and Skills for Life, from 2010, with final certification in 2012.

Weblinks: www.dfes.gov.uk/14-19
www.qca.org.uk/functionalskills

Personal, learning and thinking skills

Personal, learning and thinking skills (PLTS) are central to the revised National Curriculum for Key Stages 3 and 4, as well as to post-16 education. They are also an integral part of the Diplomas that will be available from September 2008.

The PLTS framework comprises six groups of skills. There are clear links between these and the three wider key skills (see p3).

In outline, the six groups of skills are about:

- **team working:** eg working collaboratively with other people, taking responsibility and resolving issues
- **reflective learning:** eg setting goals for learning and work, monitoring performance and reviewing progress
- **creative thinking:** eg generating ideas, tackling problems and finding imaginative solutions
- **independent enquiry:** eg planning and carrying out investigations, taking informed decisions
- **self-managing:** eg being organised, showing enterprise and responding to new challenges
- **effective participation:** eg playing a full part in school, college, the workplace or the wider community.

For each group, there is a focus statement that details the skills and qualities, and a set of outcome statements that indicate the associated skills, behaviours and personal qualities.

There is no formal assessment for PLTS but the revised secondary curriculum requires evidence that these skills are developed in all learners.

QCA reports that schools have found a range of ways in which provision for PLTS can be addressed, including through:

- subjects, with links across subjects
- separately timetabled thematic days, activity weeks and events
- activities such as arranging a fund-raising event
- visits, assemblies, out-of-hours learning.

The PLTS framework can be downloaded from www.qca.org.uk/qca_15033.aspx

Weblink: <http://curriculum.qca.org.uk/skills/plts/index.aspx>

Skills for Life

Skills for Life, the government's strategy for improving adult literacy and adult numeracy skills, was launched in January 2001. The qualifications are now available to learners at any age. In schools, the main interest has been in Adult Literacy and Adult Numeracy (sometimes abbreviated to ALAN), especially at Entry level. *Skills for Life* also includes Adult ICT and ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages). The Basic Skills Agency defines these skills as:

the ability to read, write and speak in English/Welsh and to use mathematics at a level necessary to function at work and in society in general.

The Skills for Life standards are available from Entry level to Level 2. Levels 1 and 2 are aligned with the standards for Communication and Application of Number key skills at these levels.

Assessment is through a written test. At Levels 1 and 2 this is the same test as for key skills at these levels. Candidates who pass the Adult Literacy and Adult Numeracy qualifications tests can progress to achieving the Communication and Application of Number key skills qualifications by developing a suitable portfolio of evidence.

Advice and guidance for teaching Adult Literacy and Adult Numeracy can be found in the 'Core Curriculum' documents available from the Basic Skills Agency (tel 0870 600 2400). There is also a draft Skills for Life ICT curriculum, available from DfES Publications (tel 0845 602 2260) and downloadable from www.qca.org.uk/qca_4560.aspx

In the Achievement and Attainment Tables, a Level 1 qualification in Adult Literacy or Adult Numeracy is worth 12.5 points; a Level 2 qualification is worth 23 points.

Weblink: www.qca.org.uk/qca_4534.aspx

Some contexts for developing skills

In the curriculum

GCSEs

Key skills, PLTS and functional skills are all designed to be delivered in the context of other programmes and courses of study. For most Key Stage 4 learners, this context will include a range of GCSE subjects, including applied GCSEs. Starting with the examinations in 2012, achievement of the relevant functional skill at Level 2 will be a requirement to achieve grades A*–C in GCSE English, mathematics and ICT. From 2010, evidence of achievement in PLTS will be required for all learners. As they build towards these new requirements, many schools will find that introducing selected key skills will smooth the transition.

Diplomas

The new Diplomas will be introduced in five lines of learning (Construction and the built environment; Engineering; Society, health and development; Creative and media; Information technology) from September 2008. Twelve more Diplomas will follow by 2011. The Diplomas are offered at three levels: Foundation, Higher and Advanced. Achievement in all three functional skills at Level 1 will be a requirement for a Foundation Diploma and at Level 2 for Higher and Advanced Diplomas. PLTS are an integral part of all Diplomas.

Weblink: www.qca.org.uk/qca_13911.aspx

Citizenship

While there are many opportunities to deliver key skills, particularly the wider key skills, in the context of citizenship, the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) places particular emphasis on the links between citizenship and PLTS:

The aims of the curriculum are that young people should become successful learners, confident individuals and responsible citizens. The development of personal, learning and thinking skills (PLTS) is an essential part of meeting these aims.

Weblink: www.qca.org.uk/qca_4791.aspx

Work-related learning

The statutory requirement for work-related learning at Key Stage 4 that came into effect in September 2004 is for schools to make provision for all students at Key Stage 4 to:

- learn **through** work, by providing opportunities for students to learn from direct experiences of work
- learn **about** work, by providing opportunities for students to develop knowledge and understanding of work and enterprise
- learn **for** work by developing skills for enterprise and employability.

Clearly, these all offer many opportunities for skills development.

Weblink:

www.qca.org.uk/14-19/11-16-schools/index_s4-0-work-related.htm

In enrichment programmes

ASDAN awards

ASDAN awards aim to recognise and reward young people's skills as they complete 'Personal Challenges' in areas such as sports, healthy living, community involvement, work experience, expressive arts, relationships, citizenship, personal finance and enterprise.

Personal challenges and activities will develop the following key skills:

- Communication
- Working with Others
- Improving Own Learning and Performance
- Problem Solving.

Weblinks: www.asdan.co.uk

www.qca.org.uk/14-19/11-16-schools/index_1124.htm

Young Enterprise

Young Enterprise offers a range of programmes, based on the principle of 'Learning by Doing' (ie skills-based), which brings volunteers from business into the classroom to work with teachers and students.

Some programmes enable students to work together to run their own real company. Others use games, hands-on activities and role play to develop skills and capabilities for business and enterprise.

Weblink: www.young-enterprise.org.uk

Duke of Edinburgh's Award

The DoE Award offers programmes for learners aged 14 and over. Programmes include service (helping people in the community), skills (covering almost any hobby, skill or interest), physical recreation, expeditions and a residential project. All these offer opportunities to develop a wide range of skills.

Weblink: www.theaward.org

SEAL

SEAL for secondary schools, like its counterpart for primary schools, is a comprehensive approach to promoting the social and emotional skills that underpin effective learning, positive behaviour, regular attendance, staff effectiveness and the emotional health and well-being of all who learn and work in schools.

Weblink:

www.teachernet.gov.uk/teachingandlearning/socialandpastoral/sebs1/seal

The Prince's Trust

The Trust's xl clubs in schools and other centres support young people facing difficulties in education. They work on a personal development curriculum comprising six main curriculum areas:

- personal, interpersonal and team skills
- citizenship and community awareness
- a community-based project
- a residential activity (where possible)
- entrepreneurship and enterprise
- preparation for the world of work/training.

Weblink:

www.princes-trust.org.uk

Whalley Range High School

Whalley Range High School is an 11–18 girls' school in inner city south Manchester. Students come from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds, and many are from economically and socially deprived communities.

As a specialist business and enterprise college, the school is linking skills development to enterprise. The Senior Leadership Team has successfully 'sold' skills development to staff as being fundamental to the school improvement agenda and as a way of offering a better and more effective learning experience.

Each department has elected a champion for skills. The champion helps staff to make skills more explicit in schemes of work and to identify ways of extending the teaching of enterprise skills. In doing this, staff have to take into account the fact that many learners have English as their second language.

All departments have conducted audits of the skills and enterprise competencies that are developed within their schemes of work. Good practice in one area is harnessed to help other department teams become more committed and effective.

The school is also building personal, learning and thinking skills into the extended project that they are piloting in citizenship. Students select an issue or challenge that concerns them and either produce a 5000-word written report or plan how they might produce an artefact such as a leaflet display stand, with a 1000-word evaluation. Students plan their work, obtain and analyse data, solve problems and make decisions. They review their own learning and performance through self and peer assessment, and record what they do in a diary.

The Learning Coordinator for Citizenship and PSHE stresses the need to reassure teachers and highlight the effective practice that is already in place so that staff do not see skills as 'just another initiative' that is new and unrelated to what they do.

Shooters Hill Secondary School

Shooters Hill School is based in south-east London. It has over 1000 full-time pupils on roll in post-16 provision. It links with a number of local secondary schools and has over 400 14–16 year olds attending the campus. It has extensive experience of delivering vocational subjects and is a functional skills pilot centre.

The school established a Key Skills Unit in 2002 and began by teaching key skills to the 16–19 age group. They are now able to extend this work to Key Stage 4. Staff have found that it is relatively straightforward to transfer their experience to the younger pupils.

The skills are made relevant to learners at all levels by contextualising skills teaching to the subject or vocational area. The key skills specialists work closely with curriculum areas by:

- developing key skills assignments that strongly relate to these areas
- visiting vocational classes to ensure that key skills lessons are relevant to what is being taught
- inviting vocational teachers to key skills lessons for the same purpose
- sharing key skills expertise with vocational and non key skills teachers in the school.

The school encourages all A level students to take Level 3 key skills as an additional qualification.

The school is piloting functional skills approaches for the second year. At first, the prospect of doing this was a little daunting to key skills staff. However, although there were challenges, staff were pleasantly surprised how well their expertise in key skills provision had prepared them to take this work forward.

Holywells High School

Holywells High School is an 11–16 comprehensive situated in south-east Ipswich. Of the 847 pupils on roll, the proportion eligible for free school meals and/or with special educational needs is above the national average.

In response to concerns about poor literacy levels that have been static for several years, a flexible learning pathway has been introduced for a cohort of 30 less able learners in Year 10 who are at risk of non-achievement and disengagement. This is made up of a package of work-related learning and skills development and is delivered through awards from ASDAN (including the Certificate of Personal Effectiveness, CoPE), CACHE (child care and education), and the Prince's Trust. All 30 pupils are working towards the key skills of Communication, Application of Number and ICT at Level 1. Twelve are taking the three wider key skills.

Three core members of staff have been trained to deliver key skills and will act as team leaders to guide staff in the transition to functional skills.

The pathway has a strong focus on personalisation and encourages the development of literacy, numeracy and ICT skills in purposeful contexts. The group is focused and engaged. Their attendance and punctuality have greatly improved.

Starting small with a core team of experienced and committed staff worked well. The new learning pathway has been well received, not only by the pupils but also by other staff who can see the benefits.

The Deputy Head emphasises that a school coming new to the skills agenda needs a vision and an implementation plan that shows how key skills relate to other qualifications so that a coherent learning package can be designed.

St Paul's School for Girls

St Paul's School for Girls is a voluntary-aided Catholic girls' school in Edgbaston, Birmingham. It is a maths and computing specialist school for 11–19 year olds of mixed abilities from all over the city and from a mix of social backgrounds. The school has applied to be a functional skills pilot centre.

The school has been involved with key skills since the pilot in 1997. Over the years they have carried out extensive continuing professional development (CPD) and have experimented with a variety of different approaches.

In the sixth form, most learners do Level 3 Communication and Level 2 ICT. They have one 50-minute Communication lesson per week to help develop their skills and they generate portfolio evidence from their subject areas. When subject teachers set assignments (eg in A level programmes), they identify where there are key skills opportunities.

For the last three years, the school has also been doing Improving Own Learning and Performance with the sixth form, where it is built into the review system. The process begins with an individual planning session followed by regular reviews with the form tutor, using logbooks.

The benefit of IOLP for learners is that they learn how to set SMART targets, recognise the time involved in completing tasks, ask for support and fine-tune how they learn. Sixth form results have improved; the review system has probably contributed to this. More learners are now achieving the IOLP qualification as well, although the school sees the process as the most important benefit.

The Key Skills Coordinator comments that subject teachers 'see the benefit of key skills in terms of the quality of work in main subjects'.

Deansfield High School

Deansfield High School is an 11–19 non-selective school in the centre of Wolverhampton. Of the 753 students on roll, 30% qualify for free school meals and over a third have learning difficulties and disabilities. The school has a strong commitment to work-related learning – all learners follow at least one vocational course at Key Stage 4.

In 2006 the school was selected to run a pilot project for the Key Stage 4 Engagement Programme. The 'REACH' programme was aimed at meeting the needs of learners who are likely to be stimulated by a more work-related learning environment and to benefit from alternative ways of learning.

Teaching approaches make extensive use of practical challenges, such as rock-climbing, or independent living skills, like planning and preparing a two-course meal, or furnishing a flat on a fixed budget. There is a strong emphasis on developing communication and social skills through discussion and presentations.

Learners on the programme work towards a number of qualifications:

- ASDAN awards, including CoPE
- the BTEC First Diploma, accredited by Edexcel, which involves learners taking a one-term 'taster' course in sport, customer service and engineering
- the Improving Own Learning and Performance key skill, through the work experience part of the programme. They set targets before the placement, usually relating to gaining job knowledge or improving their interpersonal skills, such as being able to ask for help. After the placement, they review and reflect on the experience.

The benefits are already showing: learners are interacting with each other much better and attendance as well as literacy and numeracy skills have all improved. At first, many learners did not like working as a group, but they are now keen to take part in discussions and to plan activities together.

Agencies

To find more information on areas covered in this guide, you may find some of the following links useful.

DCSF – Department for Children, Schools and Families

www.dcsf.gov.uk

The DCSF gives a wide range of information about the skills agenda.

QIA – Quality Improvement Agency

www.qia.org.uk

For information about QIA programmes and services including key skills, functional skills and Skills for Life, select 'Excellence Gateway'.

QCA – Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

www.qca.org.uk

The QCA website contains relevant information about all the skills described in this guide, including PLTS.

KSSP – Key Skills Support Programme

www.keyskillsupport.net

To access a wide range of publications produced by the Key Skills Support Programme, go to <http://excellence.qia.org.uk> and select 'QIA Areas of Work'.

Key Skills Trainer

www.keyskills4u.com

This website provides learning resources, practice tests and interactive games to develop learners' skills in Communication, Application of Number and ICT at Levels 1 and 2.

FSSP – Functional Skills Support Programme

www.LSNeducation.org.uk/functionalskills

The FSSP provides the latest publications to support the management and delivery of the functional skills pilots.

SNS – Secondary National Strategy

www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/secondary

This website gives up-to-date information and links to resources for those teaching at Key Stages 3 and 4.

SfLIP – Skills for Life Improvement Programme

www.sflip.org.uk

The SfLIP website gives access to a wide range of development activities for improving Skills for Life provision and raising achievement for all learners.

National Curriculum

<http://curriculum.qca.org.uk>

The National Curriculum website offers links to help providers organise, develop and evaluate the revised curriculum at Key Stages 3 and 4.

Move On

www.move-on.org.uk

The Move On website gives information on Skills for Life in a range of contexts. The site also contains links to practice tests up to Level 2.

The Key Skills Support Programme
is delivered on behalf of QIA by the
Learning and Skills Network.